

Whole by Ilovetowrite75

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Summary: El is reflecting on the loved ones who've come and gone in her life when an unexpected visitor leaves her speechless.

Whole

I haven't written in the longest time, so I apologize in advance if this is crap. I'm just testing my skills out right now. This is just a little blurb on how El and Hopper's S4 reunion might go. I have no idea how he got back home or how long Joyce and co. were gone rescuing him, but I thought this interaction would be moving. Thanks for reading and please leave a review!

El's sitting on the porch when she sees it. A faint speck in the distance. It's a car, fast approaching, its black hood gleaming in the white winter sun. It's unfamiliar to her eyes, nothing like Joyce's rusted-up Chevy. In the past year, she'd learn to love that car, a vehicle she had once detested for taking her away from Mike and Max and everything she held dear. Well, almost everything. She can't say she doesn't love the Byers. They've become her family over the past year. She would've never survived school without Will's calm, reassuring presence, and she's found comfort in Jonathan's encouraging speeches and quiet protectiveness. She's never said it out loud, but after seeing how Billy treated Max, she thinks that Jonathan is what a big brother is what is supposed to be; someone who holds you up instead of pushing you down. And Joyce, well...Joyce's contribution to her has been indescribable. She's given her what she longed for all her life: A mother. El's heart had shattered when she met Mama, and found in her vacant face the knowledge that she would never know the love that Mike and Dustin and Lucas and all children seemed to know.

She remembers that moment when she met Joyce, before she slipped into the void in a desperate attempt to save the boy who would become her brother. *I'll be right here the whole time.* Besides the kind man from the restaurant, it was the first time any adult had shown concern for her well-being. The first adult who told her that fear was normal. She remembers clinging to her in terror, horrified by the thought that they wouldn't find Will alive. And the question had presented itself in her mind; *Will you be my mother?* But at the time, she'd pushed the thought aside, worried that the kindness wouldn't last. It never did before. But it had. Through separation, possession, and a million other near-death-experiences, it lasted. Living with the

Byers, El's discovered what a mother truly is. Someone who could hold you in their arms as gently as a lamb, kissing your forehead and whispering that everything was going to be okay, but burst in roaring like a lion when you needed her help.

When it comes to love, it seems like El Hopper has everything; A caring mother, two wonderful brothers, a boyfriend who treasures her with his entire soul, and a whole army of the most loyal best friends in the world. But there's still one thing missing. One thing that's been taken away from her that she can never get back. The man who gave a real name. Her father. She's able to distract herself most of the time now, to keep the grief from consuming her. But at night, when she lays her head down to sleep, she has nothing to keep her mind occupied, and she weeps silent tears, her heart aching for the person who showed everything a good parent could be. What she wouldn't give for one more laugh, one more eggo sundae, even one more scowl. It's so unfair, she thinks. That to gain the rest of her family she had to lose the man who gave her one in the first place.

El is pulled out of her thoughts by the screeching of tires as the mysterious car abruptly stops. Joyce exits first, followed by Dr. Owens, the man who gave her her freedom, and that strange bald man who trailed behind her dad during that awful night at Starcourt.

And then a dead man steps out.

El's heart stops in her chest. She feels as if she's going to explode.

He's not real. He can't be.

He's standing right there. He's got to be.

I must be dreaming. I've dreamed about this a moment a thousand times.

Touch your chair. You can feel the wicker beneath your fingers, the frigid air against your cheeks. He's just as real as everything else around you.

She doesn't remember getting up, but suddenly she's running, her boots crunching against the snow. She nearly falls in her mad rush to get to him, fueled by love and shock and the mania of seeing a loved one rise from their grave. She's screaming, too, some combination of

the words *Dad* and *Hop*. And all of a sudden she's flying, zooming through the air in a pair of strong arms that pull her into a tight embrace.

"I always knew you'd come back," she sputters through the happiest tears she's ever cried. "When they said there was nothing to bury, I knew you were out there."

"I fought my way back, kid," he says, and his raspy voice is the most beautiful thing she's ever heard. "For you." He looks different-he's thinner, he has a long gray beard, and behind the joy there's a deep weariness in his eyes that wasn't there before. But he's still her dad, and he's here. And that's all that matters. Now Joyce has joined in on their hug, and Will and Jonathan have bolted out of the house and collapsed into their embrace. And as they all laugh and cry, El knows she's finally, truly whole.